

INTERVIEW OF JOHN HENRY ROHALLEY
By Mildred Allen Beik

March 2, 1984
Windber, PA

JR = John Henry Rohalley (1887-1985)
MB = Millie Beik

Beginning of Tape 1 Side A (March 2, 1984)

MB: Why don't you first tell me what your full name is and when you were born, if you wouldn't mind.

JR: My full name is John Henry Rohalley, (spelling) R-O-H-A-L-L-E-Y. What else?

MB: When were you born Mr. Rohalley? If you don't mind my asking.

JR: What?

MB: When were you born?

JR: I was born, might as well tell you where.

MB: Sure, where and when.

JR: Born in Tyrone, Pennsylvania, Blair County. August 15, 1887.

MB: 1887, wow. That makes you 96 then you were saying before.

JR: I think it's a little over 96 now.

MB: Yeah, I guess you'll be 97 on your next birthday.

JR: Yeah, in August.

MB: I see.

JR: 97 in August of this year.

MB: That's really something to be as independent as you are. That's wonderful- I think. I think that's great.

JR: Well, in order to make something out of myself, I had to work hard. I had no education.

MB: You never went to school at all?

JR: Oh yes, at that time the 4th reader was about the highest.

MB: So you went to just like 4th grade then?

JR: 4th grade, yeah.

MB: Can you tell me something about your parents? Were they born in the United States or did they come from someplace else?

JR: No, they were born in Austria-Hungary.

MB: Do you know where? Did they ever talk about what towns or villages?

JR: I can tell you what town.

MB: Oh, really, can you?

JR: Truzlo, (spelling) T-R-U-Z-L-O. Truzlo, Austria.

MB: Was your father born there? And then your mother?

JR: Father and mother both.

MB: So they knew each other in Europe?

JR: They knew each other in Europe, came here in 1860. My father did and after he was here for a while, he worked, he was a blacksmith by trade and after he worked and saved some money, he sent over to Europe to get his wife, she wasn't his wife, she was his sweetheart and he got her here, I don't know what year anymore. They got married here in Tyrone.

MB: So your father came directly to Tyrone?

JR: Yeah

MB: Do you know why he went there? Did he know someone there?

JR: Yes, he had friends living in Tyrone, but I don't remember their names.

MB: Well, that's pretty good to know that they were friends. So they settled in Tyrone then?

JR: Settled in Tyrone and lived all their life there.

MB: Did he continue to be a blacksmith there?

JR: No, he retired, he wasn't very old when he died. He had cancer. I can't get that through my head, I'll have to do some guessing. They didn't live in Tyrone all their life, it was about, it was either 10 or 15 years before he died that they moved to Bellwood. This was only 7 miles away from Tyrone and that's where he died. They lived there, had their home.

MB: Was he a blacksmith?

JR: No, he didn't work no more after they left Tyrone.

MB: Okay, I see. And how many children did your parents have then?

JR: There was 4 children. 4 boys.

MB: Which one were you?

JR: I'm the first.

MB: You're the oldest.

JR: All the rest are all gone. They started dying off, I don't know what trouble was, but I'm the only one that's lasted longest.

MB: Did you have any sisters or just the brothers then?

JR: Just 4 brothers.

MB: So can you tell me about your childhood in Tyrone, then? What was it like to grow up then? This would have been late 1880s and 1890s. Did you live in Tyrone then yourself? Is that where you went to school?

JR: Yes, I went to St. Matthews Catholic Church there in Tyrone, but it's pretty hard for me to remember that far back, but I left Tyrone when I was 17 years old and went to Bellefonte. Do you know where Bellefonte is?

MB: No, is it far from here? I know some of the places around here, but not that one.

JR: It's near State College.

MB: Oh, okay. I know where State College is.

JR: It's not far from there. Over the hill I guess. I went there and I connected up with- I went to work when I was 14 years old.

MB: What did you do?

JR: Driving a horse and wagon delivering groceries. That's what I started doing in a store. And about a year and a half I suppose, they promoted me from that to clerking and I've been a clerk ever since. So I clerked for the store there for, let's see, 17, 18, 19...

MB: So you're telling me about working in the store when you were 14.

JR: I worked in a store in Tyrone from 14 years old to about 17 years, about 3 years and that was getting close to the stone quarries, they have limestone quarries that they used to ship, I don't know, about 4 or 5 of those cars, not as big as those steel cars that they have now, they were smaller cars, about 50,000 capacity and there's now about 100,000 capacity. They just about doubled since that time and limestone was the work that people worked at and of course the foreigners are the people that are coming from Europe. A lot of them had friends there and they'd stop there and get the job and it was the hardest trying job, but they liked it because they didn't know any better. They worked hard. Those big rocks, they'd get them up to the car. It was really something. That was the company store that I was working for.

MB: Was that Berwind-White or someone else?

JR: It was Pittsburgh Limestone Company was the name of the company. I remember that well. Pittsburgh Limestone Company, getting their rocks in Tyrone. And people would, when they'd come from the old country, they'd get a job there. They were always looking for somebody because it was hard work, and as soon as a person had friends somewhere else and was able to get in touch with them, why, they'd quit and go away. And they were always looking for new men. So at 17 I left Tyrone and went to Bellefonte and my buddy and I, my buddy was a superintendent at one of the stone quarries and I was in the store and we decided that we were going to make a lot of money so we decided to go into business, the 2 of us, but he was older. He was a college graduate he was graduated from- I forget the name of the college he graduated from in Altoona. He had a college graduation, I never had a graduation of my own, but he decided that we were going to make some money so he quit and I quit and we went to Bellefonte and we started up a store. The store was about twice as big as this room here and we stocked it with what I knew, I wasn't very old, but I knew a lot about store business even at that moment. That was my life and I studied it. We started up this little store and we made these agreements, this, that, and some from our mind and one of our agreements was we weren't going to sell on credit. I knew that from experience. Everything was going to be cash or we're not going to sell it. That's the way that it was put down in our agreement. We went along and we were doing pretty nice. In six months I think we did over a \$1500 business, the first month we did about \$700 and the second 15 and in the third month we were doing pretty well to jump 1000 we could have made a success of it, but he changed his mind about cash business, he wanted to get more and more he wanted to give people books and trust them and increase the business, well, I said, you know Stan, you and I had an agreement and I still hold mine, but you're trying to slip away from it and I smelled a rat in what he was trying to do. Whether it was intentional or unintentional, I don't know, but he was trying to get rid of me I think. So he picked on that as one of the points. Well, I stuck to my end and he stuck to his and the agreement was we'd get \$100 month in case we would part. So \$100 a month from the start until the month that you're leaving and of course, our living at that time was all, we lived in the hotel just right across the street and at that time, living was \$22 and ½ a month and so that was all charged up to the business and we didn't have any expenses, well, individual things that you bought, but no others. So when he decided that he wanted to go credit, I said well, Stan, I'm willing to step out if you want it that way, you can have it and I'll get a job somewhere else. So I had an uncle in Pittsburgh who had a store in the meat market and his name was Pete, Peter. I was thinking about him at the time and I was telling him that I was thinking about leaving I knew that I could get a job with Peter, so I did. I left, got my \$100 a month for the 3 months I was there. The third month was just up when I left. So I got my \$300. I had borrowed \$700 from my father, no I had saved up \$700 from the time I had started to work to the time that I was leaving, so I borrowed \$300 from my father to make the \$1000 and that's what we had, he put in \$1000 and I put in \$1000 that was our capital investment. And so when we parted, we parted friends, I didn't get mad and he didn't get mad.

MB: So this was about 1904 then? If you were 17 when you went there, so that would have been about 1904? Is that right? I'm just trying to place it, if you were 17.

JR: I was 17 then.

MB: That would have been about 1904. So did you go to Pittsburgh then? And work for Peter? Did you go to Pittsburgh then and work for Peter?

JR: Yes I was going to finish.

MB: Oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

JR: And I was trying to get the 1904, no it was before that.

MB: Oh, was it? You were very young.

JR: I can trace it back, we left as friends. I got my stuff, my \$1000 back that I invested and I was happy about it. I was happy because I thought, well, if that's the kind of buddy that he is, he's kicking me around, I don't care. So I left and went to Pittsburgh. Went home first of course. Bellefonte is about, from Tyrone, about 80 miles. That's as far as I had been away from home up until I started moving out to Pittsburgh and that was a big move for me. I was 17. Well, I wanted to get out in the world and that was my chance for getting out, in Pittsburgh, so we parted and I went to Pittsburgh and got my job as I figured I would and I stayed with Uncle Pete until, well, wait a minute, yeah, I stayed with Uncle Pete until 1906. So it was about 1904. You got that figured about right because it was about 2 years lapsed from when I left Bellefonte until I got with Uncle Pete and I worked with him. I worked for Uncle Pete until 1906. In 1906 we had a terrible depression in the United States. That's the one I remember, I don't remember any other one. But that one, Uncle Pete had a nice trade there. He was among the Slovak people and the Polish poor people, his own class of people and he had a nice trade.

MB: Could I go back to your parents for just a second? Mr. Rohalley, did they speak English well or did they speak-

JR: No.

MB: What language did they speak?

JR: Slovak.

MB: Did you grow up learning Slovak then?

JR: Yeah.

MB: And the, of course, English in school probably.

JR: Yeah.

MB: So you knew, probably, Slovak.

JR: Yeah.

MB: So you could get around in it. Did you know any other languages that you picked up?

JR: I could speak 5 at one time, but they're gone. Hungarian and German, my father was, well you might say he was half German. And then, of course, he served in the army for 3 years and that was the German army. So he learned, he was pretty well, he could talk well, so I learned from him.

MB: Did you know German, too?

JR: Yeah. German, Polish, well, Polish and Slavish are almost the same, but I knew that, Hungarian I learned here in Windber when I came to Windber. I came to Windber in 1907 when I left Pittsburgh in 1906 they had this terrible depression there and the president at that time was Franklin Roosevelt, I believe.

MB: Teddy Roosevelt.

JR: Teddy. That's the one. He was trying to bust the sugar trust. The sugar trust at that time was, oh, something like the unions are now. They were pins in his flesh. You know, the people were raising up at that time. It was about time that they were getting something more than \$1.00 a day and stuff like that, so they started raising up. So when he squeezed on this trust, they reacted and they shut off the money on him. And there was no money. In Pittsburgh, at that time, the work went bad. Nobody was hardly working. Business all went to pieces. And if you did work, you just got a piece of paper, scrip, didn't get money, they paid with scrip. And then you had to go to the hotel or buy something somewhere or something in order to get this scrip changed. And that's the way they operated, and it was a poor operation. So, that's now from there on, I will remember a little better.

MB: Did your uncle's business not proper then. Did it fail then during this depression?

JR: No, they kept, they were pretty well established there. They had their own building and such there and they kept there and finally moved to Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Did you ever hear of it?

MB: No, I haven't.

JR: Well, it's only a matter of 20 miles out of Pittsburgh and Ambridge was named after the American Bridge Company.

MB: Oh, I see.

JR: And see, it was owned by United States Steel.

MB: I see, okay.

JR: So the new factory was starting up at Ambridge, they just build it up, well it was going and I mean when I came there the operation was already built and working, so my Uncle Pete thought it would be better to leave Pittsburgh since it's gone down like it has and go to Ambridge now that it's going to be a new town, and there's going to be more work, and so on. That's how he figured. Well, he did and figured it right. He went to Ambridge, and he built himself a nice store there. And he started up and had a nice business because it was all new work, and at that time, Ambridge, the American Bridge Company, was doing real good. They were getting a lot of

business. So, when I left Pittsburgh, it was in the later part of 1906, must have been – it was in March 1907 because I remember that it was in March and I remember that it was 1906 when I left there, but it wasn't 1906, it was 1907 because it was so close to 1907 that we called it 1906 yet, see? Different ways of figuring it out. Anyhow, in 1907 I came to Windber in March.

MB: How did you come to Windber? Why Windber, why not some other place? Why Windber instead of some other town?

JR: That's easy to answer, I know that one well. I didn't have a job in the last 2 or 3 months that I was there. I was going out every morning hunting for jobs all over Pittsburgh, so I got one job, one place, and it lasted about 3 days and then the depression hit and they laid off 3 of us, so I washed out. Had no job again. I went out again, I had 6 different jobs in about 3 months. And each time the depression would catch up with the business we was at, last on, first out, so I had a lot of experience, but then that's probably the reason I came here in 1907 because it was during those times I had those jobs that lasted a couple, one of them lasted a month and that was the best job I had there in Pittsburgh and that was in the, right in the center of Pittsburgh in a butter and eggs store. That's all they sold, just butter and eggs. Had a white jacket that you put on every morning when you came in and I went out to sell all day, just butter and eggs. So that was a job, but nobody had any money, couldn't buy eggs, couldn't buy butter, so they laid me off again and that was the last job I had, and by the way, you know that Pittsburgh is just now lost the building that I used to work in. It was in Market Street in Pittsburgh, there was a market there for all kinds of vegetables and that building was just demolished just 2 months ago and they're putting in a new one. So that's gone, but I, anyhow, I came to Pittsburgh, no I didn't go to Ambridge. I kept looking for jobs all the time, everyday and oh, it was cold that winter was a cold one and that bridge there, you had to go across that big bridge there from South Side to the center of the city, it was terrible, cold. That's when I froze my ears. My ears have been froze ever since then I still suffer with them. Every winter they start.

End of Tape 1 Side A

Beginning of Tape 1 Side B (March 2, 1984)

MB: Coming to Windber, why Windber?

JR: When I lost that last job in Pittsburgh and I was still hunting for another, my uncle was moving out, he didn't move out for 2 or 3 years after I left there, but I could have stayed there as long as I had a job somewhere, so okay, had nothing, reading the papers every morning all the want ads and so on. And one morning I run across an ad, want ad "Clerk wanted in Windber, Pennsylvania, in a grocery store. One that can speak more than one language, one that can speak other languages besides English."

MB: Oh, I see. That was you, I guess.

JB: So, I answered it and boy was wishing that answer would come back to come to Windber, I never knew where Windber was and it's only 50 miles from where I was born. Tyrone is 50 miles from here. I never knew where Windber was. I never knew that there was a Windber. I sent a letter in the morning and the next day at noon I had a telegram from Windber, come to

Windber, you got a job. Well, boy I was happy. I got ready that same afternoon and I was here the next day and that happened to be on Saturday when I got here in Windber.

MB: Can you tell me what your first impressions were of Windber when you came? This was a fairly young town when you came, but pretty big, too.

JR: It was a very young town and as I told you before about this scrip business, this will be a little bit off limits.

MB: That's alright.

JR: Windber at that time was paying nothing but gold and silver. They didn't pay any paper money.

MB: Yeah, do you know why that was?

JR: Yeah, because they didn't have any union here, and down here at South Fork and Cresson and all those little towns here and there, within about 12-15 miles away, it was all union. Those union fellows used to come up here and try to organize these fellows. Of course, Windber was putting out more coal than all the rest of those little mines that was down there. They probably had 40-50 men working in the mine, where they used to have 600 men working in each, in a mine like 35 or 36. This was the best coal-mining town in Pennsylvania, in fact, in the whole country, at the time.

MB: It was booming, I guess, sort of.

JR: Yeah, they paid nothing but gold and silver. All \$20.00 gold pieces, \$10.00, \$5.00, \$2.50. People saved them and put them in cans and buried them. I think there's a lot of them buried in 35 and 38 yet. I wouldn't be surprised when some generation starts ripping up some of that ground sometime and find some gold.

MB: When did they switch to paper money then? When did it go away from the gold and silver to paper money?

JR: They had paper money then, it was just the company that decided to do that to bring the people to here instead of going down to South Fork or some place. So they did. They liked that hard money. So they did. And so that's the way it was. Well then, when I got that telegram I came that Saturday, the next day I mean. No, next day because, let's see, I got the letter on Thursday- on Thursday I sent the letter, on Friday I got the telegram and on Saturday I was here. And how to get here was a problem, but I found out you jump from Pittsburgh to Johnstown and from Johnstown to Windber was a streetcar, it was no problem at all if you knew how to get here. So the street car, you know where the Palace Hotel in Windber is?

MB: Uh, huh.

JR: That was my first home when I got to Windber. I came in, the streetcar stopped. It was the end of the line, right at this hotel. I got off the streetcar and I had a pair of low shoes, but they were button. They were button shoes at that time. And when I stepped off the street car, it was in

the evening. Dark. And there was no lights on the streets at all. It was dark. So, I stepped down, and mud run up into my shoes. That was a big surprise. Well I stepped off and went up the steps, the old hotel, the old building, that's not the one that was there that's there now when I came to Windber it replaced the old one, it burned down.

MB: Oh there was an old Palace Hotel before the current one. Okay, didn't know that.

JR: Same spot and that one burned down. I boarded there for a while, but bed bugs almost eat me up, so I moved out. You don't have to tell them about the bed bugs.

MB: I don't think anyone will care now about that.

JR: So then that was in 1907.

MB: So where did you go to work. Did you go to one of the big- how many Eureka stores were there?

JR: Well in the end they had 35 stores, that's including Pennsylvania and West Virginia. See, they had a lot of mines in West Virginia, so they had stores out there. At that time they had 9 stores around Windber area and I started, they sent me down to No. 30 which was the first store that they had. They started from 30 up. I went there and that was when I got rid of the bed bugs, oh they were terrific. The house was nice and all that, the food wasn't bad. It wasn't too good, but you could get along with them, but the bed bugs were terrific. When you come in at night and say 10:00 or 11:00 and you turned the light on, on the white sheets that were on the bed, you could see those bed bugs on there. It was really a crime to lay down on them and sleep. Oh, I hated that place.

MB: You're talking about the hotel?

JR: That was the hotel. And then was young fellas and anyway they sent me to No 30. And No. 30 was down is Scalp.

MB: I know where about that is.

JR: Well, that's where I started in 1907.

MB: What was 30 like then? Mine 30? What was that area like, that that store served?

JR: Same now as it was then. No change down there except that there's no store down there. When the company closed up they sold the buildings and everything. Sold the houses too, to the miners. They sold them very cheap and the miners bought them up. They were lucky that they did buy them because some of those houses that are up at 35- 35 had better houses than 30. 30 was the worst because they were the beginners, they were starters and the houses and the store according. So I started in 1907 with Mr. Callwell, he was a manager of the store and Mr. Callwell wasn't very well, he was a sickly man, he had asthma and he wasn't able to work very many hours, he'd get asthmatic and it would punish him terrible so with me in there, I had some experience in the store and when I went in there, boy, I could have cried at the way the store

looked. It was a terrible mess. Instead of scrubbing the floor, they used to put oil on it and mop it on.

MB: Oh really?

JR: It was black, just as black as my shoes, and dirty looking. Oh, it was a miserable little place. I thought to myself, boy, there's lots of work here. So I started and after Charlie discovered that I knew something about store merchandising, he just took a little more ease and went home oftener and take a little rest and come back and left it up to me and the other clerks. So of course the other clerks didn't like it because I was a newcomer and they were there for sometime and I had ups and downs, but I never paid any attention to them, I just kept working. I got everything cleaned up and the shelves scrubbed and rearranged. Dry goods was a big business among the foreign people because they down their own sewing, you know, and my goodness, we sold an awful lot of calico and percale and all that stuff. Muslins. And when that came from the factory, well it would be folded in a certain way and then in order for us to get it on the shelf, we had to refold it and roll it and so on so that it was at it's best. So we had that to do, and we had that to re-roll and re-fix because they didn't do anything before that, they just stuck it up there anyway, just threw it up. Well, that was going on for maybe 6 months or so and we finally got to a place where I said to the boys, now we're going to stay some evening and we're going to scrub the store and I guess they didn't like that too well because I was sort of taking the place of a boss, well, I wasn't, but I wanted to get, I wanted to show them what a store should look like. So boy, we did. We got the lye and all kinds of scrubbing material and put it on good and heavy. We made a mark in the first scrub, it made a mark there that it was scrubbed, it was saturated into the wood and we couldn't take it out. So the next week I said, let's give it another scrub. It took about, if I remember right, 8 or 10 scrubs and then we finally managed to see the lumber. It was dirty. So Charlie, my boss, Charlie Callwell, he come over, he said boy, you're doing a wonderful job John, doing a wonderful job. That just fired me up. He praised me, so it made me work harder.

MB: Did you get paid well?

JR: We got paid. We didn't get paid for scrubbing the floor because that was off the list, but anyhow, he started to sort of blow me up, what a wonderful person I was, what a wonderful worker I was, all this and that and so on. And Mr. Smith was the general manager, the one who hired me in Windber store, Windber had a bigger store even at that time than the dinky that I was at. And Mr. Smith he got the word, called and made a mistake, called and praised me in front of him and boy, he just snatched me up and said I want John.

MB: So he lost you and someone else gained you.

JR: He almost cried the poor fellow. He was sincere, so from there I jumped to 35.

MB: How long were you at 30? Were you there very long?

JR: 1 year. That was at the end of the year that these GA, George A. Smith, GA we always called, he snapped me up at that time. He kept me going, poor fellow, at one of the mines in West Virginia, I felt bad because he was my best friend. Anyhow, he worked with until 1933. From 1907 to 1933 I worked with him in different stores that he'd send me to here and there. I

was sort of a supervisor for a while. Here, he went to West Virginia, they had 9 stores out there. I forget the name of the mines. And West Virginia, evidently, I've been through it, but I've never seen these mountains and these hills they're always talking about, they seem to be on one side of the creek and then another on the other side of the creek and they're just straight up and down and the coal is down, the vein of coal is pretty down way to the bottom of those hills. So you got to get down into those different valleys. Well, they use – anyhow it's a motor that pulls up with a rope these mine cars up and down those big hills when they get loaded up in the bottom and then they got to pull it back up in order to get it back into the cars and this steep hill, he was going down to the mines just to look around and he got a heart attack and he died right in the car. Just scared to death and he was a fine gentleman. Very, very fine, highly educated. He was a wonderful person. Well, anyhow.

MB: You worked all around then, all the different stores, supervised.

JR: All around, St. Michael, Windber, Pottsdale and Remey. All the places they had. And then I finally, Mr. Smith asked me to take the Windber store.

MB: That's the big one.

JR: Big one, yeah. And I said, I didn't want to take it because I didn't have enough education to take that store, but I had experience and experience counted more than education, in this case anyhow because you could get education, I mean, you could get people to typewrite and people to write your letters. As long as your had the experience to tell them what to do. Anyhow, I had the experience and he knew it and so in 1927, no, yeah. I can count by where I worked. It was 1909 when I moved and the next move was 1927. And that move was from 40 Mine to Windber. From the 40 store to Windber. And I was well established in 40 Mine. I liked it over there and people liked me and we were doing good business and not having any trouble so I liked it there. He calls me up and says there's an offer for this store and John, he says, I've got something for you, you've been waiting for this a long time. We haven't done much for you. I said, but I'm satisfied, Mr. Smith, you've done very nicely with me. You always treated me right and I've been very well satisfied. Well, he says, that counts as a secondary, John. You haven't been making much money. I said, well, that's one place you're right. He was the one that was doing it. Johnny he says, now I've got a chance for you to get somewhere. He says, I want you to take charge of this Windber store. The whole department store. And you'll be taken care of, now you're old enough now that you should be pretty much settled, you're forehead, he was looking at my forehead and my hair was about that far back. He said you're forehead is getting a little larger so you much be getting wiser. So I said, no, Mr. Smith, I'm satisfied where I am. And I think I better stay at 40 and John, he said, don't do that, you can't do anything by standing still. I said I realize that very much, but I think this job here at Windber store is just a little bit more than I would like to do. Well, he says, you can do it, John, you can do it. I know. I said, you know it, but I don't. I talked to him just like I would a friend. And I said I'm afraid Mr. Smith, I can't decide today. I'll have to take a little more time than that. How much time do you want, John? Well, he gave me a week. He gave me a week, so I went back to work and started figuring, figuring, figuring, all I figured out was that I better not go. You know why?

MB: Why?

JR: The last two men he had there, managers of that store, the same job he's offering me, they only lasted a little over a year apiece. Two of them and one of them was from a big store in Detroit. The largest store there, I forget the name of it. And the other one was from New Jersey, he was also connected up with Macy's one of the big stores they have there. And he was from there and he didn't last a year.

MB: They get fired? Yeah.

JR: Because they didn't understand it, they came here from big cities and this wasn't a big city. People in Windber, some of them didn't know, never see a boat even. Well, he went and bought a lot of boats, all kinds of boats, that long and that long. Some of them 30, 40, 50, up to 60, 125 dollars and he had them up all over the jewelry department on the ledges up there, they looked pretty.

MB: But no one bought them I guess.

JR: No body bought them. They didn't have any use for them. They didn't know anything about boats. And so they didn't buy them and he lost his job and then the other fellow he bought gold watches and stick pins with little diamond chips on them as high as \$175-200 for a tie pin. Probably never even seen one.

MB: I don't think so, pictures I've seen, though.

JR: You just stick them in a tie. Well, the one thing that was good, they kept the 2 parts of your tie from moving around the way it is now, but that's about all.

MB: Oh, I see.

JR: \$175. No miner has ever paid \$175 for stickpins. Well, see, that's the kind of merchandise they were used to buying. But they came here and there was nobody wearing diamond stickpins. He lost his. It wasn't for that, I reasoned that, I reasoned why they lost out. If it wouldn't be for that, I knew that where they came from and what they were doing and to come here to a town, to a place like this where there was nothing but common everyday labor, and there was no stickpins or anything like that used. Or they didn't have to have any, or they don't have fireplaces and places like that in their homes so that they need to put these boats on them. Well I reasoned all that and I was right and I finally decided that I would take the job. So I did and I was there 23 years.

MB: From about when to when?

JR: When I retired.

MB: From 1927, was that right?

JR: No, that was- in 1927 was when I left there. When I started.

MB: And you were there 23 years, so that would be until 1950.

JR: That was '48, no '49. The end of '49.

MB: Is that when you retired?

JR: Yeah, the end of '49.

MB: That would be right then, '27 to almost 1950. Okay. That's a long time to work and manage a big store like that.

JR: Well anyway, I made out okay. Went in there and the biggest trouble most of our managers had was that they couldn't control credit. And credit killed them always because they'd get too much credit out. Then they didn't show much profit. And I was always strict on credit. I left one store when I first, my first investment I made in my life, when I went into business there in Bellefonte and I left there because of credit. My buddy wanted credit and I said no. I tell you no, I mean it. I stick to it, I and I always did. And I carried that through all my career, my life, and it helped a lot, sticking to what I believed in.

End of Tape 1 Side B

Beginning of Tape 2 Side A (March 2, 1984)

MB: I'll mail you a copy of these tapes so you'll have them, maybe your grandkids will want them someday.

JR: That's good, they don't know anything about me yet. Anyhow, let's see, where were we?

MB: You were talking about credit, could you tell me about like how the store operated and stuff.

JR: Well, credit was given to the man when he started to work in the mines, and if he had no money, why, they would give him credit to buy his tools-shovel, pick, and all that.

MB: Oh, the miner brought those. I see.

JR: Mining tools. Well, they'd start him off, see. Well, then, then he'd start digging coal, and he'd make \$3-\$4 or something like that. Well, then, he had \$3-\$4 credit at the store. Well, then, maybe next day he'd make \$3-\$4 and maybe not need anything and so in a week's time he might have \$15 -\$20. He might even have \$30 credit. Well, he could get \$30 worth of credit then. Or, if he didn't need it, he'd take whatever he needed. Take \$2 credit or \$3 or \$4 or \$5. It was up to him. It wasn't forced on him by the company. He didn't have to buy from the store. He was treated as well at the store as he was anywhere else that he could get, could buy, the same quality merchandise.

MB: Were there other merchants in town when you first came?

JR: There was always another trying to make a living, you know. And there was

(Track Time 3:12, Tape Recorder battery begins to die)

MB: The company must not like that though

JR: ...because they didn't have to force people to buy because they could keep their groceries...

MB: Could you tell me anything else about how the store worked? I don't really know how to ask you things. Did you buy lots of ethnic foods because of the population being Slovaks, Hungarian, and so on?

JR: There was no such thing as that.

MB: No?

JR: It was all ethnic.

MB: It was all ethnic.

JR: Everybody was eating potatoes and sauerkraut, and you know, regular food like I said, food. But the English liked it, too- the Americans. They got to use it. They found out it was more filling and more strengthening than some of the pies and cakes. ...so I forget a lot, there's a lot I don't remember.

MB: You're doing fine, you remember a lot.

JR: Anyhow ...

MB: Then tell me again.

JR: ...I worked from 1907 to 1948, so 41 years I worked...

(Track Time 7:53, new batteries installed in tape recorder)

JR: At that time I was in over in 38 store at that time and we had, let's see- what year was that '17, '18?

MB: I think it was 1918 or 1919, the flu epidemic.

JR: Well, I was just thinking, we used to have horses and wagons to deliver with and then later I bought an International truck and discontinued the truck, sold them. And when we had this epidemic we used this truck to haul to Windber hospital, oh it was terrible, terrible.

MB: Was that one of the worst things that happened, do you think?

JR: Uh, huh. One of the worst things that I've seen here. Pitiful, but I was pretty strong though and I guess that's the reason I didn't fall down when the rest of them did.

MB: Did your wife get it at all?

JR: She got a bad cold, but she didn't get the flu. If she would have got the flu, she would have died because she was never well, second child that we had, that she had, that sort of threw her off the well side.

MB: Did she have her children at home or at the hospital?

JR: At home at that time.

MB: Did they have midwives that came? Do you remember who came at all? Did you call like a neighbor? How did that work or if somebody were sick or a woman was going to have a baby? Do you remember that at all?

JR: That's pretty hard for me to say anything about that. I don't know. They would call, they would know and call one another. They'd have it fixed up so when the time come they would get the help.

MB: I guess most women had their babies at home, then.

JR: Oh yeah.

MB: They didn't go to the hospital.

JR: Well, they charged you for having a baby in the hospital. It's a thousand dollars.

MB: My youngest is 13, so I don't know. It must be at least that. And most people have them in hospitals although there are some who don't. So why did people go to the hospital? Mining accidents or the flu epidemic and things? Otherwise they pretty much did things at home, didn't they? Health things.

JR: The hospital was always full with people who go up to the hospital for everything. You don't have any doctor's service anymore around here. You got to go to the hospital. Yeah, I have an appointment, I've already forgotten when it is. Oh, the 7th, the 7th of March and I was just there yesterday. I have two appointments there. My leg here swells, it swells awful.

MB: Do they give you medicines for that?

JR: I went to a new doctor, orthopedic, this medical doctor has been treating me for about 5, 6 years and hasn't done any good, so I traded and I finally told him, I'm going to try the orthopedic doctor. So I did and he was just trying to find out what is wrong with me now. I started last week and he prescribed, I forget now what they called that bath

MB: Jacuzzi? Whirlpool?

JR: Whirlpool. Just that one leg. Just this one leg you put in that tub and for, I think, put that whirl on for 20 minutes or half an hour. Something like that. It feels good when it's in that water and the water is 110 degrees. So it's not too hot and not too cold, just right 110. Boiling point is 212 so it's just about half way.

MB: Does that help, do you think?

JR: Well I took, 2, 3, shots of it already and yesterday after I had the bath well then I went up to, I had also to go to the doctor then after I had the treatment and he said, it's not doing anything and I said, I know, you don't have to tell me that doctor, I know it. He said he's going to try something else.

End of Tape 2 Side A (Track Time 14:23)

End of Interview with John Henry Rohalley (March 2, 1984)